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ABSTRACT

Noting that research on long-term effects of attending preschool has found social as well as cognitive effects, this study explored the association between preschool participation and adolescent goals and activities in a sample of 80 urban eighth graders who had attended different types of preschool and kindergarten programs. The sample was 55 percent female; 94 percent of the sample were African American. Most students (76 percent) qualified for subsidized school lunch based on low family income, and 70 percent lived in single-parent families. Students were individually interviewed using a modified version of the Youth Follow-Up Interview. Subjects reported that the hardest adjustment in the transition to junior high school was the new school routine, followed by adjusting to a new physical environment, and making new friends. Findings indicated that these inner city students were highly involved in the typical activities of early adolescence. Their educational and career aspirations were high. More adolescents involved in extracurricular activities hoped to complete college. Few had violated rules of their community, and all had accomplished something that made them proud. Adolescents who had attended preschool were more likely than those who had not to be proud of themselves for achievement-related reasons and, of those, graduates of child-initiated preschools were most likely to report prosocial reasons for feeling proud. Graduates of teacher-directed, academic early childhood programs had somewhat lower postsecondary aspirations, were less likely to participate in sports, and were the only ones to report intentional violation of community rules. (KB)

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Goals, Activities, and Reflections of Inner-City Adolescents:

A Follow-Up Comparison of Early Childhood Models

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Abstract

Research on long-term effects of attending preschool have found social as well as cognitive effects. For example, preschool graduates had a more positive attitude toward self that was linked to achievement and different types of preschool programs affected rates of delinquency, participation in extracurricular activities, and post-secondary educational aspirations. This study explored the association between preschool participation and adolescent goals and activities in a sample of 80 urban eighth graders who had attended different types of preschool and kindergarten programs. The sample was 55% female and 94% African American. Most students (76%) qualified for subsidized school lunch (based on low family income) and 70% lived in single parent families. Students were individually interviewed using a modified version of the Youth Follow-Up Interview (Lazar et al., 1982). They reported the hardest adjustment in the transition to junior high school was the new school routine, followed by adjusting to a new physical environment, and making new friends. Findings indicated these inner-city students were highly involved in the typical activities of early adolescence. Their educational and career aspirations were high. More adolescents involved in extracurricular activities hoped to complete college. Few had violated rules of their community, and all had accomplished something that made them proud. Adolescents who had attended preschool were more likely to be proud of themselves for achievement-related reasons and graduates of child-initiated preschools were most likely to report prosocial reasons for feeling proud (i.e., helping my grandmother, teaching others). Graduates of teacher-directed, academic early childhood programs had somewhat lower postsecondary aspirations, were less likely to participate in sports, and were the only ones to report intentional violation of community rules. Follow-up studies are planned to extend these findings in order to compare the plans and reported behaviors of early adolescence with future choices and activities.

Goals, Activities, and Reflections of Inner-City Adolescents: A Follow-Up Comparison of Early Childhood Models

Research on long-term effects of attending preschool have found social as well as cognitive benefits. In follow-up interviews of participants in 12 studies, the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies found preschool graduates had a more positive attitude toward self that was linked to achievement and older students rated their school performance higher relative to others in their classes (Lazar, Darlington, Murray, Royce, & Snipper, 1982). Additionally, important social consequences associated with preschool model have been noted for low-income children who are at increased risk for school failure. By age 15, graduates of teacher-directed, academically focused preschools had less desirable social-behavior outcomes as indicated by higher rates of delinquency, less participation in extracurricular activities (especially sports), and lower post-secondary educational aspirations (Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986). For high-risk youth, participation in school extracurricular activities was associated with increased educational aspirations (Waxman & Sulton, 1984), reduction in early school dropout (Mahoney & Cairns, 1977) and lower rates of criminal arrest (Mahoney, 2000). Thus, research on the association between preschool participation and adolescent goals and activities provides useful information about at-risk youth. The current study provided such information for urban adolescents who attended different types of preschool and kindergarten programs.

Method

A stratified random subsample of 80 urban, public school adolescents (M age = 160.7 months, 92% in eighth grade) participating in a longitudinal study were individually interviewed using a modified version of the Youth Follow-Up Interview (Lazar et al., 1982). The sample was drawn from 19 schools, with 60 students having graduated from either a pre-kindergarten

(Pre-K) or Head Start program in this school district and 20 students entering school for the first time as kindergartners. The sample was 55% female and 94% African American. Most students (76%) qualified for subsidized school lunch (based on low family income) and 70% lived in single parent families. Children who attended Pre-K or Head Start experienced either a child-initiated (CI) preschool model (n = 20), an academically directed (AD) preschool (n = 20), or a "middle-of-the-road" (M) approach (n = 20) that combined the other two models. In kindergarten, 66% (n = 53) attended programs focused on academic preparation (Ac/K) and 34% (n = 27) were in programs where socioemotional goals (Se/K) were most important.

Results

Goals and Aspirations

This sample of urban adolescents had high postsecondary aspirations with 61% indicating plans to complete college and 19% planning on graduate or professional training. Most students (52%) wanted a job classified as professional (i.e., doctor, architect, engineer) when they grew up, and 24% aspired to a career in entertainment or communications. Although all students lived in Washington, DC, only 1% indicated they would like a job in government as a public servant. When asked which grown-up they admire most, 84% named a family member and 74% indicated their respect was based on personal character.

Accomplishments and Violations

Compared to classmates, 42% rated their school performance as being higher than peers and only 1% rated it as worse than others. Two-thirds gave achievement-related reasons for being proud of themselves, with 59% describing an academic achievement as the accomplishment that made them feel proud. The worst trouble most (51%) had ever been in was violation of a home rule (i.e., breaking curfew, fighting at home, disobeying parents). Serious violation of school or community rules were reported by 38% and 10%, respectively.

Extracurricular Activities

Participation in extracurricular activities was high, with 84% involved in school, church, or community activities. Among involved students, the top three activities were sports (48%), music (36%), and religious group (24%). There were no differences in postsecondary aspirations of extra-curricular participants and nonparticipants ($p = .49$) although only 8% of nonparticipants planned to complete college compared to 21% of those involved in extracurricular activities. Likewise, no differences were found in reasons for being proud of themselves ($p = .19$) or violations committed. All but 35% reported they did work for which they were paid, with 35% of working students paid for babysitting, 33% earning money for house or yard work, 33% paid for helping with carpentry or farming, 12% involved in sales, and 1% paid for office work. The top five leisure time activities were media/TV/movies (62%), sports/physical activities (61%), friends/social (52%), family time (28%), and reading/writing (28%). All but one student reported watching television, with 58% watching more than 3 hours a day. Nonparticipants in extracurricular activities were more likely to watch over 3 hours of television daily (85% v. 53%), $\chi^2 (3, N = 79) = 6.11$, $p < .11$. An average of 3.5 hours a week was spent reading books or magazines and 78% reported reading the newspaper.

Transition to Junior High School

Students reported the hardest adjustment was a new school routine (60%, i.e., changing classes, lockers), followed by a new physical environment (24%, i.e., didn't know where to go) and making new friends (20%). The top five reasons why 52% of the students preferred elementary school over junior high school included more positive personal feelings in elementary school (36%), their teachers (33%), academics (29%), friends (24%), and the routine (24%). Of the 44% who preferred junior high school, 34% reported more positive personal feelings in junior high school, 34% liked the rules better, 20% preferred the routine,

and 17% liked the new responsibilities.

Early Childhood Model

Tables 1 and 2 compare findings for students who attended (a) preschool and those who did not (K-only), (b) different preschool models, and (c) different kindergarten models. Few differences were found for these urban adolescents. Educational goals were similar

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

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although graduates of CI and AD preschools were more likely than Model M preschoolers to aspire to a college degree, χ^2 (4, N = 60) = 21.13, $p < .01$. In all comparisons, career aspirations were high with significantly more students than expected wanting a professional job when they grew up. No difference in comparative ratings of school performance was found, but adolescents who had attended preschool were more likely to be proud of themselves for achievement-related reasons, χ^2 (1, N = 78) = 2.60, $p < .11$, and graduates of CI preschools were most likely to cite prosocial reasons for feeling proud (i.e., helping my grandmother, teaching others), χ^2 (2, N = 60) = 5.25, $p = .07$. Adolescents who had not attended preschool were somewhat more likely to have intentionally violated a community rule (i.e., damaging others property), χ^2 (1, N = 78) = 2.32, $p < .13$. Although participation in extracurricular activities was high, K-only students had an even higher rate of participation than did preschool graduates, χ^2 (1, N = 80) = 3.02, $p = .08$. Adolescents who had attended socioemotional kindergartens were more involved in sports, χ^2 (1, N = 67) = 3.28, $p = .07$, but Ac/K graduates participated more in music, χ^2 (1, N = 67) = 3.83, $p = .05$, and cheerleading, χ^2 (1, N = 67) = 3.24, $p = .07$. Students did not differ in amount of weekly reading, but more preschool graduates watched less than an hour of television each day, χ^2 (1, N = 79) = 7.80, $p = .05$,

and Se/K graduates were more likely to read the newspaper, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 80) = 3.32, $\underline{p}$ < .07. In junior high school, preschool graduates reported greater difficulty adjusting to the new physical environment, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 80) = 3.18, $\underline{p}$ = .07. New school rules were most difficult for graduates of Model M preschools, χ^2 (2, $\underline{N}$ = 60) = 4.54, $\underline{p}$ = .10, and Se/K kindergartens, χ^2 (1, $\underline{N}$ = 80) = 3.00, $\underline{p}$ = .08.

Discussion

These urban and predominantly low-income, minority students were highly involved in the typical activities of early adolescence. Their educational and career aspirations were high. Few had violated rules of their community, and all had accomplished something that made them proud. Like Lazar et al. (1982), these preschool graduates held positive attitudes toward self that were linked to achievement but unlike Lazar et al.'s findings, they did not rate their school performance higher than peers. Although not always statistically significant, graduates of teacher-directed, academic early childhood programs did, like Schweinhart et al. (1986), have somewhat lower postsecondary aspirations, were less likely to participate in sports, and were the only ones to report intentional violation of community rules. Similar to Waxman and Sulton's (1984) findings, more adolescents involved in extracurricular activities hoped to complete college. Additional follow-up studies are planned to extend these findings in order to compare the plans and reported behaviors of early adolescence with future choices and activities.

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Table 1

Adolescents' Aspirations, Accomplishments, Violations, and Adjustments by Early Childhood Model

	Attended Preschool (n=60)	No Preschool K-only (n=20)	Preschool Model CI (n=20)	M (n=20)	AD (n=20)	Kindergarten Model Se/K (n=27)	Ac/K (n=53)
Educational Plans					**		
Complete high school	7%	10%	0%	10%	10%	7%	8%
Some college	13%	0%	5%	35%	0%	11%	9%
Complete college	62%	60%	80%	35%	70%	56%	64%
Graduate/professional	17%	25%	15%	15%	20%	18%	19%
Job/Career Aspirations	***	**	+	***	***	***	***
Professional	52%	50%	40%	60%	58%	48%	54%
Educator	8%	5%	15%	10%	0%	7%	8%
Entertain/Communication	22%	30%	30%	15%	21%	30%	21%
Clerical	2%	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%	2%
Trade	5%	5%	5%	5%	5%	7%	4%
Business	8%	10%	10%	5%	10%	7%	10%
Public Service	2%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	2%
Admire Most							
Family member	88%	90%	83%	83%	95%	83%	90%
Teacher/counselor	3%	10%	0%	6%	5%	8%	4%
Acquaintance/peer	2%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Celebrity they know	7%	0%	11%	11%	0%	8%	4%
Qualities Admired							
Personal character	73%	90% +	83%	61%	75%	71%	81%
Achievements	41%	60%	28%	61%	35% +	58%	40%
Behavior toward student	41%	50%	33%	44%	45%	38%	46%
School Performance							
Much better than others	5%	10%	5%	5%	5%	7%	6%
A little better than others	40%	25%	50%	25%	45%	30%	40%
About same as others	55%	60%	45%	70%	50%	63%	53%
A little worse than others	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Much worse than others	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Reason Proud of Self							
Achievement-related	73%	53% ‡	60%	80%	79%	73%	65%
Worst Trouble/Rule Violation							
School rule	40%	35%	30%	45%	44%	30%	43%
Home rule	34%	35%	40%	35%	28%	41%	31%
Intentional community	2%	10% ‡	0%	0%	6%	4%	4%
Unintentional community	7%	5%	10%	10%	0%	7%	6%
None	17%	15%	20%	10%	22%	18%	16%
Hardest Adjustment to Junior High							
Friends	20%	20%	20%	25%	15%	22%	19%
Teachers	17%	20%	25%	15%	10%	18%	17%
Academic	15%	5%	20%	5%	20%	7%	15%
Activities	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Routine	60%	60%	50%	60%	70%	63%	58%
Rules	3%	10%	0%	10%	0% +	11%	2% +
Responsibilities	3%	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%	4%
Physical Environment	28%	10% +	20%	35%	30%	15%	28%
Uncertain	3%	0%	5%	0%	5%	0%	4%
Positive Personal Affect	7%	0% ‡	5%	0%	15% +	4%	6%
Negative Personal Affect	18%	25%	25%	5%	25% ‡	11%	24%

‡ $p < .13$ + $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Adolescents' Extracurricular Activities by Early Childhood Model

	Attended Preschool (n=60)	No Preschool K-only (n=20)	Preschool Model CI (n=20)	M (n=20)	AD (n=20)	Kindergarten Model Se/K (n=27)	Ac/K (n=53)
Extracurricular Participation	80%	95% +	85%	80%	75%	89%	81%
Extracurricular Activities							
Scouts	4%	5%	12%	0%	0% ‡	8%	2%
Religious group	27%	16%	35%	25%	20%	21%	26%
Sports	44%	58%	41%	43%	33%	62%	40% +
Music	40%	26%	41%	32%	40%	21%	44% *
Art, photography	2%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Newspaper	4%	5%	6%	0%	7%	4%	5%
Social club	15%	5%	18%	19%	7%	8%	14%
Service club	15%	10%	29%	6%	7% ‡	17%	12%
Cheerleading, pompom	15%	10%	24%	6%	13%	4%	19% +
YMCA, Boys/Girls Club	2%	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%	2%
Academic	11%	16%	0%	27%	7% *	13%	12%
No Paid Work	33%	40%	35%	45%	20%	37%	34%
Students Paid for Work							
Babysitting	31%	50%	31%	18%	40%	24%	41%
House or yard work	36%	25%	38%	36%	33%	41%	29%
Sales	15%	0% +	15%	18%	13%	12%	12%
Office work	3%	0%	0%	9%	0%	6%	0% ‡
Other (carpentry, farming)	31%	42%	38%	27%	27%	47%	27%
Leisure Time Activities							
Family time	28%	25%	30%	30%	25%	26%	28%
Friends/social	55%	45%	55%	55%	55%	48%	55%
Religious activities	2%	5%	0%	5%	0%	4%	2%
Sports/physical	63%	55%	70%	60%	60%	70%	57%
Music	20%	20%	40%	5%	15% *	26%	17%
Art	12%	10%	20%	0%	15% *	7%	13%
Reading/writing/library	27%	30%	30%	20%	30%	22%	30%
Media/TV/movies	68%	45% +	80%	55%	70%	41%	74% **
Paid work	17%	10%	10%	20%	20%	11%	17%
School work	17%	5%	10%	30%	10%	15%	13%
Volunteer work	2%	0%	5%	0%	0%	4%	0%
Sleep	3%	10%	0%	10%	0% +	7%	4%
Nothing	0%	5% +	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%
# Hours Watch Television		*					
Over 3 hours a day	58%	58%	50%	60%	65%	54%	60%
2-3 hours a day	17%	10%	25%	10%	15%	8%	19%
1-2 hours a day	12%	32%	15%	10%	10%	23%	13%
Under 1 hour a day	13%	0%	10%	20%	10%	15%	8%
# Hours Read Books/Magazines M per week	3.58	4.15	3.05	3.90	3.80	3.89	3.64
Read Newspaper	77%	80%	75%	90%	65%	89%	72% +

‡ $p < .12$ + $p < .10$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$